

## **The Kapia on the Bridge - Images of a Civil World**

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In the past, in times of crisis like ours now, people have sometimes conjured up hopeful images that expressed possible solutions to their situations. Such imagery is usually created and explored more by artists than by politicians. Poetry has the capacity to find this kind of image, as does dance, as they both capture an otherwise inexpressible combination of historical and visual experience, of time and space, of insight and emotion, within their forms.

I have one of these hopeful images of a civil world before my eyes. It comes, paradoxically, from a novel that takes place not far from Sarajevo, in what has sometimes seemed a hopeless region of ethnic conflict and war. This image comes from Ivo Andric's *The Bridge on the Drina*. It is not precisely the bridge itself I am thinking of, however, but something in the middle of that bridge, called the *kapia*.

The image of a bridge, and the task of "bridging," have frequently been evoked in recent discussions on social capital, networking, and the need to bring people together in an increasingly divided world. But the bridge in Andric's book is a very special one. It is special not so much because it is picturesque, but because it widens in the middle, to allow for something more than just the crossing of the river. The bridge's significance lies in this extra space, called the *kapia*, with its terraces or "sofas" on either side, which, throughout the centuries the novel spans, accommodates conversations, get-togethers, and the savoring of Turkish coffee by those who most frequently use the bridge. Muslim Bosnians and Turks, Orthodox Christian Serbs, and later on also Catholic Croats and Jews all sit together on the *kapia*. The *kapia* is thus a place where those who would otherwise not meet can look at each other, sit together, and get to know each other. With its "sofas" on both sides, a stand with a brass coffee-maker, and a constant flow of people from different cultures, the *kapia* makes it possible for people to look "through one another's eyes," and to plant the seeds of trust.

We do have a *kapia* of our own, a richly textured space made up of layers and layers of diverse but always civic-minded initiatives and organizations, and inhabited by individuals working in their local communities, or constituting imagined communities that transcend national or cultural borders. We find our *kapias* in Cracow and in Cape Town - as well as through the new Interdependence Project, highlighted on the last page of this Bulletin. These spaces help us to know and appreciate each other while still allowing us to retain our cultural specificities. This fills me with hope.

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